[**OSH conventions**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1725273/osh-conventions)

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AT present, the International Labour Organisation, along with the European Union, is persuading Pakistan to ratify two conventions on occupational safety and health (OSH): C155 — Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981, and C187 — Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006. Out of 190 ILO conventions, Pakistan has ratified 36, which include conventions on the freedom of association; collective bargaining; forced labour; child labour; equal remuneration; tripartite consultation; discrimination (employment and occupation); and minimum age.

The EU’s GSP-Plus gives developing countries, including Pakistan, a special incentive to pursue sustainable development and good governance. The scheme helps job creation, better working conditions and the improvement of macroeconomic indicators. The EU wants Pakistan to ensure full compliance by organisations of the ILO’s 27 conventions, in order to continue multilateral trade through GSP-Plus. Fifteen conventions relate to core human and labour rights and 12 to environment and governance principles.

The scheme will expire in 2023. Pakistan will have to reapply for GSP-Plus status and the decision will be taken by the EU parliament in four to five months. Continuity is subject to ratification of an additional five to six conventions related to environment and social standards, listed among the 27 conventions. At present, the scheme is confined to the textile sector; the extension of GSP-Plus would hold great significance for Pakistan’s economy.

Although Pakistan has not yet ratified conventions 155 and 187, the Factories Act, 1934, has comprehensive provisions on health and safety. Even after a presence of 88 years, and with few amendments, most of its regulations are still relevant. Besides, the Act provides for the framing of rules of hazardous occupations in factories.

Employers are either not aware of safety risks or feign ignorance.

In 1963, the government enforced nine rules relating to hazardous occupations in the factories. The organisations are required to identify hazardous jobs in factories and get workers engaged in them medically examined after every six months. Unfortunately, compliance is poor.

There is also the Sindh Occupational Safety and Health Act, 2017. It has been enforced for the protection of persons at work against the risk of injury arising out of the activities at the workplace. The provisions of this Act are mostly based on OSH conventions C155 and C187.

Excluding multinationals and a few other progressive organisations, employers’ compliance with occupational safety and health laws has been disappointing. There have been several deadly fires and other mishaps in which many workers have died.

Over 250 workers died in Karachi’s Baldia factory fire in September 2012. Similarly, in another fire incident, 16 workers of a chemical factory in Mehran Town, also in Karachi, lost their lives in August 2021.

The employers are either not aware of OSH risks or pretend to be ignorant. Ensuring the implementation of OSH regulations by employers is difficult unless the competence level of labour inspectors is improved and the lifafa culture eliminated.

C155 requires a national policy on occupational safety, health and the working environment to be framed in consultation with the organisations representing employers and workers. It makes both parties responsible for ensuring they implement the guidelines. The employers will have to ensure that the “machinery, equipment and processes under their control, are safe and without risk to health”. The same goes for chemical, physical and biological substances and agents. They will have to provide workers with “adequate protective clothing and equipment”. On their part, workers should cooperate in their employers’ fulfilment of their responsibilities.

C187 provides a promotional framework for OSH. The national policy under this convention is to also be made in consultation with representatives of workers’ federations and employers’ bodies. The policy “shall promote basic principles such as assessing occupational risks or hazards; combating occupational risks or hazards at source; and developing a national preventive safety and health culture that includes information, consultation and training”.

Ratification of these OSH conventions will have two advantages for Pakistan. It will enable the extension of GSP-Plus, with the possibility of inclusion of trade with the EU of products other than textiles. The government will have to be vigilant in forcing and monitoring the employers to implement the OSH regulations as non-conformance will neither be tolerated nor is it affordable. The ILO and EU should not have to identify a serious failure in the effective implementation of any of these conventions.

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